

SR 161 Stakeholder Committee Meeting #5
Eatonville Elementary School Library – September 21, 2003
Meeting Summary

Committee Members:

Sandi Anderson John Halmo
Bobbi Allison Philip Beach
Shawn Phelps

Interested Citizens:

Judy East, The Dispatch
Harold Fish

Staff:

John Donahue	Vicki Steigner	Steve Bennett
Lynn Hakes	John Nisbet	

The meeting began at approximately 6:10 pm, as Sandi Anderson reported traffic conditions were difficult and the meeting start was delayed to accommodate those arriving from the north. John Donahue greeted the committee members and interested citizens, and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to present final recommendations and seek the endorsement of the Stakeholder Committee. John also introduced John Nisbet and Steve Bennett from the Olympic Region Traffic Office, who were attending to explain how speed limits are set and answer other traffic related questions, as many questions about traffic had been brought up during the Graham Hill public meeting in September.

John Donahue briefly reviewed the stakeholder process, and presented a review of the two public meetings which were held since the fourth Stakeholder Committee meeting on August 12th. These meetings were conducted on September 25, 2003, at Frontier Junior High School in Graham, and on October 21, 2003, in the Forest Theater at Northwest Trek. He also reported on the October 13th meeting between Pierce Transit and WSDOT staff to discuss their plans for future public transportation along this route, and options for the residents.

During the September meeting in Graham, the proposal to add a fourth lane with median barrier was presented to the community. While the community members attending the meeting acknowledged that forecasted capacity warranted the fourth lane, they were unanimously opposed to median barrier. Their reasons for opposing the median barrier were that they felt the two-way left turn lane provided refuge for them to get out of the traffic while turning, they objected to the expense and inconvenience of the U-Turn installations, and the fire chief spoke out against medians because they could delay their response time and damage trucks if driven over. There was a great deal of interest in the process for lowering the speed limit on Graham Hill.

John Nisbet passed out a brochure which explained the process for setting speed limits, and explained the philosophy behind it. There were several questions and comments about speed limits and regulatory and advisory signing from members of the Stakeholder Committee, which were answered by John Nisbet and Steve Bennett. The question was

asked about how a new speed study could be initiated for SR 161. John Nisbet said that the request he was hearing at the meeting was enough to initiate the process, and they would probably complete a new speed study on Graham Hill by the end of November. Vicki Steigner agreed to insure that results from the speed study were forwarded to interested members of the community.

Besides regulatory speed limits, there was a discussion about alternative ways to get people to slow down. There is some success with changing people's perceptions of the road, such as alternative striping narrowing the roadway or by landscaping. It was cautioned that the design of such alternative means must not compromise safety, and that any landscaping should consist of plantings that could be driven over.

The accident history at SR 161 and 274th Street was discussed. This intersection is not currently designated as a High Accident Location. It was suggested that perhaps the slope could be flattened along SR 161 so that cars entering SR 161 from 274th Street would have better sight distance and visibility. Although slope flattening can be a relatively fast and cost effective way to help this situation since it can be done by maintenance forces, the amount of right of way owned by WSDOT can be a limiting factor in implementing this solution. Steve Bennett agreed to study whether the slope could be flattened in this location.

John Donahue reported on the October meeting in Clear Lake. At this meeting, the bypass proposal, which may provide a more direct route for through traffic and eliminate the need for a climbing lane, was presented to the community. The development of a new route would require an environmental corridor study. The community members attending the meeting identified many environmental concerns along the corridor where the bypass route would likely be sited, and they were unanimously opposed to the bypass suggestion, preferring improvements along the existing route. Some of the environmental elements identified by the residents along the corridor for the suggested by-pass route, such as historic cemeteries and homesteads, salmon bearing streams, and wildlife corridors, were briefly discussed.

John Donahue then presented the recommended solutions for endorsement by the Stakeholder Committee by route segment.

Segment 6: Graham Hill vicinity – The mobility solution for this segment is a five- lane section, two southbound lanes, two northbound lanes and a two-way center left turn lane. This recommended solution will carry the stipulation that when a project is funded for this location, if there is a change in accident history, operating speeds, land use or accesses the need for a median barrier as opposed to a two-way left turn lane will be revisited, and community input will again be required. The suggestion that a left turn refuge for traffic entering 255th St. remains as a recommendation for this segment in order to express the significant community input we received about getting these vehicles out of the traffic stream.

The Stakeholder Committee added the recommendation that the existing viewing pull outs on Graham Hill be better marked with signs to direct those wishing to view Mt. Rainier to these safer areas.

Stakeholder Committee members unanimously endorsed the recommendations.

Segment 5: Kapowsin vicinity – The proposed solutions for the segment from MP 13.17 to MP 15.70 consisted of mobility and intersection improvements. From MP 13.17 to MP 15.09 there is a proposed three-lane section, two lanes southbound and one lane northbound to provide an adequate level of service. Just north of that location, from MP 15.09 to MP 15.07, a five-lane section, two southbound lanes, two northbound lanes, and a two-way left turn lane is proposed for sake of continuity tying into the proposals for Segment 6. Within segment 5, there are three proposed intersection improvements, a southbound left turn refuge at 288th Street, a northbound left turn refuge and acceleration lane at 274th Street, and lengthening the southbound left turn refuge to better accommodate the school buses at 264th Street.

Stakeholder Committee members unanimously endorsed the recommendations.

Segment 4: Clear Lake vicinity – Several recommendations for this segment of highway were presented. A mobility solution, consisting of a three-lane section from MP 8.5 to MP 11.0 to accommodate climbing and passing lanes, was proposed. Intersection improvements at 352nd Street including a northbound left turn and acceleration lane, a southbound left turn refuge at Clear Lake Road South, and combining Benston Road and Barney Larson Road to create a single intersection with SR 161 at a 90 degree angle were proposed. Other improvements include the proposal for a bicycle/pedestrian facility from Eatonville Cutoff Road to Benston Road to tie into the Pierce County non-motorized plan. By community request, a southbound pull out area in the vicinity of MP 9.50 is proposed to provide a safe place for tourists to view Mt. Rainier over the lake.

These recommendations were endorsed by a “thumbs up,” (“I like it”) by all Stakeholder Committee members except one, who voted “thumb across,” (“I can live with it.”)

Segment 3: North of Eatonville – A number of recommendations for this segment of highway were presented. A mobility solution, consisting of a three-lane section to provide climbing lanes is proposed from MP 3.33 to MP 6.12. Intersections improvements were proposed at Ski Park Road/Ohop Extension Road including a southbound left and right turn refuge, and a right out for Ohop Extension Road; a northbound left turn and acceleration lane at Ohop Valley Road; realignment of the intersection at Ohop Creek Road to 90 degrees; provide for a southbound left turn refuge at Orville Road; and a traffic signal at SR 161 and Eatonville Cutoff Road. A bicycle/pedestrian facility is proposed from Eatonville to Eatonville Cutoff Road, which is a high priority for the Pierce County non-motorized plan. There was also the recommendation that sanding take place earlier during icy periods in the vicinity of MP 3.33 to MP 4.30.

The Stakeholder Committee suggested one additional intersection improvement in the vicinity of Ski Park Road/Ohop Extension Road. It is a preference for a northbound left turn refuge at Ohop Extension Road, while restricting right turns onto Ohop Extension Road.

Stakeholder Committee members unanimously endorsed the recommendations.

Segment 2: Eatonville – Recommendations for two improvements within Eatonville will help document the work of the study for the use of the Eatonville Comprehensive Plan update, which is currently being developed: Traffic signal at Center St. and creation of a park and ride lot. Other suggestions for improving this segment were not promoted as RDP recommendations, since it was the staff's belief that more community input, and better coordination with the Comprehensive Plan Update, was required to insure that they would be successful. These suggestions will be described for the town's use during the public input phase of that update.

Stakeholder Committee members unanimously endorsed the recommendations.

Segment 1: South of Eatonville to SR 7 – Recommended no improvements since the level of service is anticipated to remain adequate.

John concluded the meeting by explaining the review process for the Route Development Plan, including a thirty-day review at WSDOT headquarters. The members of the Stakeholder Committee expressed a desire to review a copy of the draft RDP while it is undergoing internal WSDOT review. The details about how that draft distribution would be accomplished were developed, and they involve email to key contacts.

The Stakeholder Committee members were thanked for their time and commitment to the development of the RDP. The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:10 pm.